

LOCKDOWN WEEK EIGHT THOUGHTS

Today, the 12th of May, is significant for at least two reasons. First it is the birthdate of Florence Nightingale who was born 200 years ago on this day, and second, it marks the start of week 8 of lockdown.

I guess we are all aware of the achievements of Florence Nightingale, and her pioneering work in nursing, which transformed the profession and allowed it to become the highly skilled occupation it now is. We all have reason to celebrate and be grateful to those who have followed in her footsteps. What is not a cause for celebration however is the lamentable lack of PPE for nurses, doctors, medics generally and carers. It is a sad reflection on how those who are in the frontline caring for people are treated. I wonder what Florence Nightingale, herself a committed Christian, would have to say about the situation. These people need our support, and prayer, of course is one way, but not the only one, of demonstrating this. They need more than our applause too. They need the kit too.

As we enter week eight of our lockdown we are receiving messages that there will soon be some slight easing of the measures, we will be able to get out more, a few more shops will open, including Garden centres (hooray, do I hear some of you saying?). But social distancing and use of facemasks in crowded situations like public transport remains very much on the agenda.

After seven weeks of lockdown how do you feel about this? "About time too", excited, relieved, worried, confused as to what it will look like, or how it will roll out, or concerned that it seems too soon? I admit to a rather confusing cocktail of all these emotions, some of the time all of them at once. I long to be able to get back into the churches, but part of me is worrying away at HOW it could workout in practice, will people observe Social Distancing, will they wash their hands, avoid touching their faces, will we run out of hand sanitiser, and given that we will not be able to hand out service books, the added burden on *somebody* to provide a service sheet of sorts, which must then be disposed of after every service? Will I have to wear a face mask if distributing Communion? What new rules will be issued for hygiene, and how do we ensure the church is properly clean? And what about the fact that a majority of our congregations here are over 70? That will certainly have some bearing on who actually turns up for services.

In some ways it could be easier simply to retreat back into the security of our little domestic worlds, for a considerably longer time, but would this be right? To be perfectly honest I don't have an answer to this, and come to that I'm not sure anyone else has either, yet, which is why caution and small steps seems to be the only way forward.

God is a God who leads, and encourages. I am reminded of the song by Sydney Carter, a great favourite at BBC Songs of Praise, "One more Step". It does not envisage us taking a few confident strides towards our destination, but just "one more step" and focuses on the need to keep on travelling, with God as our companion. Rather like Jesus with his two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Perhaps this extract might speak to our situations at this time:-

*As I travel through the bad and good, keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go you'll be telling me the way, I know.
Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough;
And it's from the old I travel to the new; keep me travelling along with you.*

I will conclude with a short prayer that comes from the ancient order of Compline, a night service, and perhaps helpful and valuable as we retire to bed:-

*Be present, O merciful Lord, and protect us through the silent hours of this night,
so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world,
may repose on thy eternal changelessness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

In Christ's love Alice